

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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SUBJECT: PRESS FREEDOM: GOOD NEWS AND BAD

REF: A) MANAGUA 2087, B) MANAGUA 2423, C) MANAGUA 2324,
D) MANAGUA 0459, E) MANAGUA 2021

1. 20 JUNE WAS A DAY OF GOOD AND BAD NEWS FOR THE RADIO INDUSTRY IN NICARAGUA. MORE PARTICULARLY, RADIO MI PREFERIDA, WAS AGAIN THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION. IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT, AS A RESULT OF A 7 A 7 MAY BROADCAST OF FALSE REPORTS THAT A NATIONAL GUARD BARRACKS IN CHANANDEGA HAD BEEN ATTACKED AND BURNED AND THAT A FIREFIGHT WAS OCCURRING IN MANAGUA, THE GON WAS IMPOSING A 60-DAY CLOSURE ON THE STATION. MANUEL JIRON, OWNER-MANAGER OF MI PREFRRIDA, WAS FINED CORDOBAS 5,000 (APPROXIMATELY DOLLARS 715). THIS IS THE THIRD TIME SINCE 1 MAY THAT MI PREFERIDA HAS BEEN CLOSED (REFTELS).

2. ADDITIONALLY, JIRON WAS FINED CORDOBAS 1,000 (APPROXIMATELY DOLLARS 142) FOR HAVING BROADCAST ON 4 MAY AN INFLAMATORY ACCOUNT
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OF A STUDENT DEMONSTRATION AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSCEY CAMPUS HERE (REFTEL A).

3. FORTURE, HOWEVER, DID FAVOR FIRON WITH A SMILE THE SAME DAY. AN APPEAL TO THE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT, MORA, LODGED BY HIM TO OVER-TURN AN EARLIER FINE OF CORDOBAS 10,000 (DOLLARS 1,429) WAS GRANTED. THE FINE WAS IMPOSED AS A RESULT OF A BROADCAST ON 22 JANUARY WHICH

QUOTED A PARAGRAPH FROM THE NICARAGUAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE'S "MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR 1978". (REFTEL D) THE QUOTE FROM THE PASTORAL LETTER WAS SEEN BY THE AUTHORITIES AS VIOLATING ARTICLE 47 OF THE RADIO AND TELEVISION CODE WHICH PROHIBITS BROADCASTS WHICH THREATEN THE PUBLIC ORDER. RADIO MIL CARRIED A COMMENTARY ON 21 JUNE WHICH DESCRIBED THE DECISION ON THE APPEAL AS AN ATTEMPT BY THE GON TO IMPROVE ITS PUBLIC IMAGE. LA PRENSA MAINTAINS THAT THE COURT DECISION WAS A PUBLIC RELATIONS MOVE BY THE GON IN PREPARATION FOR THE IAHRC VISIT.

4. IN OTHER EVENTS, THE NEWS WAS ALL BAD. WILLIAM MONTIEL Y PENA, FORMER NEWS DIRECTOR OF RADIO MI PREFERIDA, WAS FINED ON 20 JUNE CORDOBAS 1,000. THE FINE STEMS FROM A 19 MAY BROADCAST IN WHICH MONTIEL REPORTED A NATIONAL GUARD INCURSION (REFTEL C) INTO A MASAYA SCHOOL WHICH THE RADIO SAID RESULTED IN THE DEATHS OF TWO STUDENTS (IN FACT, THERE WERE TWO STUDENTS WOUNDED). IT WAS RULED THAT THE BROADCAST VIOLATED ARTICLE 57 OF THE CODE BY FAILING TO IDENTIFY THE SOURCE OF THE REPORT.

5. ADDITIONALLY, ALLAN TEFEL ALBA, DIRECTOR OF THE NEWS PROGRAM "EL PENSAMIENTO" ON RADIO CORPORACION IS CURRENTLY IN THE MIDST OF PROCEEDINGS AGAINST HIM AS A RESULT OF A 2 JUNE BROADCAST OF AN INTERVIEW WITH ALFONSO ROBELO, LEADER OF THE MDN. THE TRANSGRESSION APPEARS TO BE THAT ROBELO CALLED INTO QUESTION SOMOZA'S MENTAL COMPETENCE. EMBOFFS WERE TOLD BY ANOTHER JOURNALIST THAT THE PROBLEM FOR THE GON IS THAT TO QUESTION THE MENTAL COMPETENCE OF THE PRESIDENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DENT RAISED THE QUESTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL SUCCESSION IN SUCH AN EVENTUALITY.

6. FINALLY, ACCORDING TO RADIO MIL A NEW PROCEEDING IS BEING INSTITUTED AGAINST MI PREFERIDA. IN A RECENT EDITORIAL, JIRON STRONGLY DENOUNCED INCOMPETENT ADMINISTRATION AND POOR SERVICE IN TELCOR, THE TELEPHONE COMPANY. IT APPEARS THAT, AFTER REFLECTING UPON THE MATTER, GENERAL HERBERTO SANCHEZ, DIRECTOR OF TELCOR, HAS TAKEN THE CRITICISM PERSONALLY AND INSTITUTED SUIT FOR DAMAGES.

7. COMMENT: MOST OF THESE CASES ARE "OLD" NEWS, THAT IS, NO MORE THAN CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PREVIOUSLY-REPORTED CASES. THE 60-DAY CLOSURE OF MI PREFERIDA IS THE STRICTEST MEASURE YET APPLIED TO CONTROL THE BROADCAST INDUSTRY. IN APRIL, RADIO MUNDIAL WAS HIT WITH A THREE-MONTH SUSPENSION (REFTEL E), BUT IT LATER WAS REDUCED TO 15 DAYS. THE SUSTAINED APPEAL APPEARS TO BE THE FIRST INSTANCE IN WHICH MORA HAS OVERRULED A DECISION OF DIRECTOR OF RADIO AND TELEVISION, CNEL. LUNA, AND HOLDS OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT WELL-FORMULATED LEGAL APPEALS MAY BE SUCCESSFULLY PROSECUTED WITHIN THE EXISTING SYSTEM.

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